

More to the Story: Jonah – by Jeff McClain
Jonah 3:10-4:11

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Boone UMC

Series intro – More to the Story

- Looking at familiar bible stories, often ones used for children's VBS, want to explore additional angles, go deeper, think on them in ways that don't always get addressed

Jonah recap – reluctant prophet

- God asked him to go, ran other way
 - o Nineveh – not a good assignment – wicked, pagan, hated enemies of Israel
 - o Toward Tarshish – complete opposite direction
- Boat sinking in storm, Jonah thrown out, sailors worship God (Jonah the evangelist!)
- God provides “great fish” – part we usually remember about the story
 - o Jonah swallowed, facing death, prays to God who saves him, spit up on shore
- Jonah finally listens, goes to Nineveh, tells them “Repent or be destroyed!”
 - o And they actually listen!
 - o Let's pick up the story there

READ Jonah 3:10-4:11

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

4:1 But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.

2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.

3 And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

4 And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

5 Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

6 The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush.

7 But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered.

8 When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die."

10 Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night.

11 And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

More to the story: Jonah's response – he became angry

- Anger – don’t often talk about Jonah’s anger
- At dinner last night, told someone preaching on anger – Anger on Father’s Day?
 - o I’m just the messenger. I try to go with what the Spirit tells me.

I struggle with anger. We all do in our own way.

Father’s Day Tributes – stories of dads and anger

- My dad – once hurt back with lawnmower
- Pull starter, wouldn’t start – but that’s not how he hurt back
- Got hurt when he picked up the mower and threw it over the fence
 - o I come by my anger honestly
- What a terrible tribute to my dad on father’s day! He’s really fantastic and loving father!
 - o he always takes his anger out on inanimate objects, not people
- Me – I came home recently on edge one day: tired, hungry, impatient, frustrated
 - o My three year old told me she had made something to help
 - o She told me that in children’s church they read about David and Saul
 - When Saul got angry, David played harp to calm him down
 - Anne had made harp for when her parents get frustrated. Really sweet.
 - o Started talking about something else, time passed, I got up and walked to rest room
 - Anyone ever use bathroom as your “safe room”? Place to get away?
 - I had just walked in there, hear Anne’s footsteps running in behind me
 - I snapped – “Can I just have some privacy for a minute please?” Slammed door.
 - As door is closing on her (quickly) I see out of the corner of my eye she’s holding an art project. Yes, her brand new harp she’d made for me. You know, the one she made to calm me down when I get frustrated? My poor little girl, she was crushed, eyes started welling up, ran to mom. Father of the year, right here!
 - o Anger can be a dangerous and hurtful thing!

Lots of anger all around us today, common experience, always seems to be bubbling below surface, ready to explode on moment’s notice. All kinds of triggers:

- tired, hungry, sick, stressed
- relationship trouble – family/friends
- hearing the news – politics, world events
- combination of all these things

What makes you angry? Where does your anger come from?

In this final chapter of Jonah we learn that Jonah is angry – about a perceived injustice

- Life not fair, something’s not right
- Angry that God asked him to go to Nineveh – city of evil people – goes the other way
- When he finally obeys and preaches repentance, Nineveh repents and God changes his mind about destroying them. You’d think Jonah would be happy – his mission succeeded! But instead Jonah gets angry.

- 4:2 He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.
 - o I knew it! I knew you are gracious and compassionate and that you'd change your mind.
 - o I don't want you to! Those lousy godless heathen Ninevites deserved to be destroyed!
- Jonah sulks. God asks – Is it right for you to be angry?
- God decides to make this a teachable moment.
- God provides bush/plant for shade. God provides worm to eat plant. Jonah even more angry.
- God asks – Is it right for you to be angry about the plant? Yes, angry enough to die!

What is it that makes you angry?

I was at Mepkin Abbey (monastery) last weekend on prayer retreat

- Father Gueric – one of monks, parish priest for 30 years, hospital chaplain, now at Mepkin
- In his pastoral experience, anger is often result of unresolved grief.
 - o Wonder if that resonates with you?
- Thomas Merton (Trappist Monk, writer, theologian) – anger comes from lack of:
 - o control/power
 - o safety/security
 - o love
 - o We tend to think we can manage all these deficits on our own, fix them, make up for them. But of course we can't. Ultimately we're not in control, no guarantees of safety, no ability to make someone love us. We walk around wounded, with holes in our hearts.

Where is your anger coming from?

Father Gueric – anger is one of biggest obstacles to spiritual growth

- takes so much energy to be angry
- so easy to keep replaying incidents over and over in your mind
- anger can be all-consuming, making the holes in our hearts bigger and bigger
- leaving no room for anything else but anger

Need to find healthy productive ways to respond to anger, fill those holes

- violence and abuse are never acceptable responses to anger (REPEAT). Help is available!

How do we fill the wounded holes in our hearts?

- offer up those wounds to the one who made our hearts

This week when you feel anger welling up, take a moment to press pause and ask yourself God's question to Jonah: **Is it right for you to be angry?**

Is it right for you to be angry? – NO

- If I'm honest, most of the things I get angry about aren't worthy of much attention or energy. And I simply need to learn to move on.
- One way – find something to be grateful for to counteract your anger.
 - o **It's hard to be grateful and angry at the same time.**
 - o If you struggle with road rage, thank God you have a car.
 - o If you're upset with a coworker, thank God you have a job.
 - o In the story I told earlier about being Father of the Year, I was angry because I wanted some space and my daughter was crowding me.
 - In retrospect, might have thanked God for house w/ many spaces for alone time
 - More importantly, might have thanked God for two beautiful daughters, one of whom was showing how much she loves me by helping when I was frustrated
 - If I had paused for just a moment and thought about that, I'm sure I would've had a more gracious response to my little girl
- When you feel the anger rising up, press pause. Ask yourself if it's right to be angry about this. If not, give God thanks instead for something about that situation.

Is it right for you to be angry? – YES

- Anger is a very real and human response. It's ok to be angry. In some situations it's absolutely the right response.
- Scripture is full of expressions of anger.
 - o God gets angry at the Israelites often. Moses does too.
 - o David gets angry and questions God in many of the psalms. Find one to pray.
 - o Jesus turns over the tables of the money changers outside the temple.
- Anger, in and of itself, is not sinful. Anger can be a biblical and righteous response. Especially when it involves injustice.

The best response to righteous anger – anger that laments injustice – is to bring it before the Lord and let God direct our way forward. Coming before God with our broken, wounded hearts allows time for God to fill those wounds with holy healing. This kind of healing takes time. Don't rush it. It requires that we be willing to sit with our anger as we allow God to restore and reshape our hearts, so that when we do respond we look more like Jesus.

We're not good at taking things slowly. Especially when it comes to anger. When emotions run high we want to strike. Make something happen. Get the retribution we think we deserve. But quick, emotional responses in the heat of the moment rarely lead to good outcomes. That's why it's so important to take time to sit with our anger. Acknowledge it. Hold onto it. And bring it to the Lord.

- Spoke with someone this week (not from our church) having very serious marriage trouble. They're still together but it's really tough. There's been a breach of trust and it's uncertain whether the marriage will survive it, but they've got kids so they're trying. She said, "I can't see myself staying married. But I can't see us divorcing either. How do I go forward?"

- She doesn't want to allow herself to be bitter, even though by all accounts she would be entirely justified. She often finds herself so angry she can't be in the same room as her spouse. It just hurts too much.
- Tucked in the back of a closet is a gift she prepared for him months ago, before their marriage blew up. It's something she put a great deal of thought and effort into, but she can't bring herself to give the gift yet.
- When she looks at it she thinks about everything that's gone wrong lately and she just wants to throw it across the room, or stomp on it, or pitch it in the trash. But she can't. Because she also thinks about the love that she put into that gift – the memories incorporated into it and the new ones that will result from it.
- And so instead of tearing it up or throwing it away, she simply sits on the edge of the bed and holds it. Sometimes she cries. Sometimes she prays. Sometimes she just stares at it, not knowing what to do but simply acknowledge the pain, grief, and anger in her spirit. Eventually she puts it back in the closet for another day.
- In the middle of this hell on earth she says, "With all my being I believe God's grace can win in the end. I've never felt that grace so strongly before now. I just need enough of it to get through today. And then tomorrow. And then the next day."

I wonder if we can learn to see anger as an invitation to grow spiritually. To expand our understanding of God's grace. To deepen our trust in God's faithfulness.

I believe that's what God was inviting Jonah to do. Jonah was sure his anger was justified because the Ninevites were evil. Surely God would want to destroy them, right? But through an object lesson with a plant and a worm God showed Jonah that God's grace was much wider than Jonah had previously imagined. Jonah got upset when his shade plant was destroyed even though he had no part in creating it. God says, "You're concerned with that plant you had nothing to do with and you don't think I'm concerned about Nineveh, that great city, full of people and even animals I created?"

[CR: INVITE WORSHIP TEAM UP]

It's interesting that we don't see resolution to the Jonah story. It ends right there with God's question. Does Jonah stay angry forever? Do the Ninevites continue to love the Lord their God? Spoiler alert – only for a hundred years or so, but then they go back to their old ways and the Babylonians destroy them. But that's another story. Does Jonah learn anything from his prophetic excursion to Nineveh? Scripture doesn't tell us. The story is left hanging there. In that way Jonah is a fitting scripture to open our series "More to the Story." It's like the author of Jonah invites us to imagine for ourselves how the story ends.

God's word invites us to the same thing in the story of our lives. How will we hear this word of God today? How will we respond the next time we feel anger welling up in us? Will we lash out because we feel justified in doing so? Will we suppress it and let it fester and grow? Or will we acknowledge it, sit with it, hold it? Better yet will we ask God to hold it for us and direct our response? Will we accept God's invitation to trust more fully in God's faithfulness? In the midst of our anger, will we come to know and experience a deeper understanding of God's grace? I can't wait to find out! Amen.

